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LUTHER'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIGHT OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

By PRESERVED SMITH, Amherst, Mass.

"No villain need be; passions spin the plot;
Men are betrayed by what is false within."

—*George Meredith.*

Nowadays in all lines men are turning less than formerly to dramatic incident, and more to psychological struggle; less to the outward phenomenon and more to the inward cause. Novels and plays alike depend less than they once did on catastrophe and more on internal development. Historians, too, are laying less stress on plainly visible signs than on less obvious spiritual causes.

In the Reformation, for example, the Diets of Worms and Augsburg are not only exciting but they are significant moments, for they focussed the attention of Europe. Yet they would never have been possible but for long and silent preparation, an important part of which took place in the solitary cell of a Wittenberg cloister. Far be it from us to attribute the greater part of any strong historical movement to the influence of a single individuality. On the other hand let us not, in our desire to simplify, forget the importance of personality. Few great revolutions have been more dominated or more fully represented by a single man than was the Reformation; the age thought his thoughts and spoke his words, and, in short, received a durable impression from his genius. Realizing the tremendous importance of many other factors in the movement, let us for the moment devote our study to this one, asking what manner of man was Luther, and what were the sources of his spiritual power. Such questions are, of course, capable of only an imperfect answer. Psychology has hitherto hurled itself on the problem of genius as on an impassible barrier. It is quite certain that the whole of a man's life is accounted for by natural causes, the elements of his heredity and environment, but at present so large a portion of these forces are and must remain unknown, that we are forced to act on the maxim somewhere enunciated by William James: "The originality of a man does not date

from something anterior; on the contrary certain other things date from it." But while fully realizing that all cannot be explained, we believe that very much can be ascertained by careful study of the materials at hand and by the comparative method.

In undertaking a candid, and, as far as in me lies, a scientific examination of a great man's psychological origins and growth, I must protest, against the possible offence that some of my conclusions may give, that nothing is less my purpose than "to drag the radiant in the dust." It is surely evident that great men are subject to exactly the same natural laws as their fellows. The common assumption that spiritual value is undone if a lowly origin be asserted is surely false, as James¹ has so well pointed out; far more than we realize or like to admit, our highest impulses of love, religion, and morality are rooted in physical, even in pathological conditions. If the branches of the tree reach toward heaven, its roots strike deep into the dark bowels of the earth.

Approaching our subject then, exactly as we would any other man, and taking up first his heredity, it is difficult to deny that he inherited a taste for drink and possibly some of the defects that go with that diathesis. His father, like so many of his contemporaries, drank to excess, that is, to the point of intoxication.² Martin himself apparently avoided this extreme, but that he drank a great deal more than was good for him cannot honestly be denied.³ It is possible to see a consequence of this in the weakness, both of mind and body, of his second son, also named Martin.⁴ The direct results of alcoholism are as yet problematic; but it is generally agreed, and this is all that is claimed in the present study, that it probably conduces to mild forms of neurosis and unhealthy excitability. In Luther's case this showed itself in his most

¹ W. James. *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1908, pp. 10ff.

² E. Kroker. *Luthers Tischreden in der Mathesischen Sammlung*, 1903, No. 193.

³ On this, my *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 1911, pp. 318ff, and H. Grisar, *Luther*, ii, 1911, 244-65.

⁴ In a play called "Maternity" (English translation in *Three Plays by Brieux*, 1911), the French physician Brieux has given a terrible picture of a case parallel to that which we are studying; an old peasant who occasionally became drunk has a son who stops short of this but drinks steadily and much, and as a consequence has feeble offspring. But this conclusion may be denied.

A German physician named Drenkhahn believes that as alcoholism decreases other nervous diseases increase. An answer to him by E. Bleuler, *Alkohol und Neurosen. Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen*, 1912, iii, 848ff.

conspicuous fault, a hot temper and almost unbridled violence of language.

His childhood was very unhappy. Almost all his reminiscences of it are either of corporal chastisement or of spiritual terrors. His father was a sturdy character, but hard; he once whipped his boy so severely that the latter hated him for it and fled from him for a season.⁵ His mother, too, beat him at one time for stealing a nut, until the blood flowed;⁶ but in her case he seems to have borne no lasting resentment, for, on recounting this incident many years later he immediately adds that such discipline was meant heartily well. It was with tender affection that he remembered his mother's pathetic little song:

If no one's kind to you and me
The fault, I think, of both must be.⁷

The sexual life of the child begins sooner than is realized by most adults, cut off from their infancy by a curtain of amnesia. This would not be worth while noting for itself alone; but the momentous results from these first impressions for the whole spiritual life of the individual, justify or rather necessitate a close examination of this otherwise unpleasant side of the child's experience. Now Luther is a thoroughly typical example of the neurotic, quasi-hysterical sequence of an infantile sex-complex; so much so, indeed, that Sigismund Freud⁸ and his school could hardly have found a better example to illustrate the sounder part of their theory than him.

According to these psychologists, the first sexual feeling of the child is usually evoked, quite unconsciously of course, by one of the parents. The boy, in total ignorance of the nature of his own feelings, finds himself his father's rival for his mother's love.⁹ This gives rise to jealousy and hatred of the

⁵ *Luthers Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann und Bindseil, 1844ff, iv. p. 76.

⁶ Kroker, *op. cit.*, no. 753.

⁷ *Luthers Werke*, Weimar, XXXVIII, 338.

⁸ Freud's writings are full of this: e.g., *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci. Schriften zur angewandten Seelenkunde*, VII, 1910. Cf. O. Rank, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, 1909, with quotation from Freud, p. 7. E. Jones, *Der Alptraum in seiner Beziehung zu gewissen Formen des mittelalterlichen Aberglaubens*, 1912.

⁹ "The first sexual excitation of the boy comes from the mother; his first hatred is for the father." Quotation from Freud, in O. Rank, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

father,—just as we have seen to have been the case with Luther,—and these feelings are soon transferred to other adult males. As the consciousness of sex emerges, whatever is connected with that is noted by the child and thus stamped upon his memory. As soon as Luther went to school he had the same unhappy experiences with his teachers that he had had with his father. He not only records with justifiable resentment that one morning he was whipped fifteen times without fault,¹⁰ but also he remembered the obscene jokes made by his pedagogues so plainly that nearly fifty years later he was able to repeat one of them to his students.¹¹

The fascination of sex for the child is not purely erotic, but is also due to the mystery with which the subject is surrounded. He broods long over its problems, as for example how babies are born. While still in the uncertain stage Martin was intrigued and impressed by hearing that a pretty young woman of the village had brought forth a dormouse.¹²

When first the secret of marriage is revealed to the boy, he naturally applies his knowledge to himself, particularly in that relation in which he is most interested. It is undeniable that Luther's thoughts turned in this direction. The story which he repeated oftenest in later life was one of incest between mother and son.¹³ He says he heard the scandal while a student at Erfurt; but his mind must have been in some measure prepared for it, or it would not have made so deep an impression on him.

At this sensitive stage the boy's mind was filled with spiritual terrors. The devil intervened in all daily life; he and his angels made storms;¹⁴ the child could not throw a stone in a lake without provoking the devils living in the water to raise a tempest.¹⁵ There was a witch who plagued his mother, for she could make children cry themselves to death.¹⁶ What anguish there must have been in this thought for the child! And this old woman, too, or at least one like her, was connected in his early thoughts with the mysteries of marriage.

¹⁰ G. Lösche, *Analecta Lutherana et Melanthoniana*, no. 545.

¹¹ Kroker, *op. cit.*, no. 753.

¹² *Commentary on Genesis, Werke*, Weimar, XLIII, 692.

¹³ *Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, I, 68; II, 367. *Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann und Bindseil, IV, 78. Lösche, *op. cit.*, no. 308 with three parallels in unpublished manuscripts of table talk. *Corpus Reformatorum*, XX, 589. Kroker, *op. cit.*, 706, 90. It also occurs elsewhere in his voluminous and poorly indexed works.

¹⁴ Kroker, *op. cit.*, no. 170.

¹⁵ *Lauterbachs Tagebuch*, ed. J. K. Seidemann, p. 65.

¹⁶ *Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann und Bindseil, III, 96f.

A story he "heard as a boy," and related many years after,¹⁷ was about such an one who showed herself in malice the superior of the devil; for when the evil spirit had tried in vain to separate a man and wife, she accomplished the result by hiding a knife under their pillow, thereby giving the husband the idea that his spouse intended to murder him, with the effect that he murdered her. This story, so banal in itself, stamped itself upon Martin's memory because it was the expression of a suppressed dread; the fear that the witch might do something even worse than make him cry himself to death, might separate his father and mother, turning the hated parent against the dear one. No one familiar with the researches of Freud and his scholars into the mind of the child will find this explanation of the story far-fetched or other than necessary. It is truly remarkable that of the very few recollections of his early childhood related by Luther in his table talk, so large a proportion should support the theory here advanced of the deep influence of this infantile complex on his subsequent nervous and spiritual development.

This influence showed itself in two ways; first in his obsession by the devil, secondly by the peculiar part played in his growth by the idea of concupiscence. The former is usually dismissed with a few words about Luther being a man of his age, emerging from the superstitious peasant class. But this only explains the smallest part of his belief, namely the form which it took. This, undoubtedly, he borrowed from the Bible and the current German demonology. But the nervous diathesis which made the devil so real to him, in short the obsession, the "Zwang," was peculiar to himself. Careful study into the lives of his contemporaries, Erasmus, More, Melancthon, Calvin, show that although they inherited much the same superstitions as he did, believed in the devil and occasionally attributed great misfortunes, public or private, to his direct interposition, their personal consciousness was untroubled by what with Luther was the most real and terrible experience in his life. The fact of the obsession might be verified by hundreds of citations¹⁸ from the Wittenberg professor's works and table talk. A glance at the relevant words in the indices of these volumes will turn up any quantity of descriptions of how the devil appeared at night to dispute with him, and of the vividness and horror of his apparition. The most graphic description of these visions is, perhaps, that in

¹⁷ Preger, *Luthers Tischreden nach Schlaginhausens Aufzeichnungen*. No. 196.

¹⁸ A collection of them in Grisar, III, 231ff.

the book *On Private Masses and Ordination*,¹⁹ in which a long argument with the Prince of evil is fully set forth. When the spirit appeared Luther tells how his heart beat, so that he almost died on the spot. But such visits were nothing extraordinary. He assures us he disputed with the devil every night.²⁰ Dreams came to him because Satan was there to prevent his resting, for "the devil can torture me so that sweat pours from me in sleep. . . . My hardest battles have been in bed."²¹ About the year 1513, while studying in the Wittenberg cloister at night, he heard the devil roar thrice from hell, and had not the courage to wait to hear more.²²

Turning now for an explanation of this clearly abnormal condition to the specialist in nervous diseases, we read²³ that such obsessions are due to suppressed subconscious forces; devils, psychologically considered, are functional symbols of the repressed but not eliminated elementary sexual life. The origin of the belief in the nightmare, the incubus and the personal devil, is, in short, due to a condition of the nerves, frequently brought on by an abnormal infantile sexual life. Belief in such devils is but a projection of early experienced dread and forcibly repressed wishes, the wish namely to imitate certain functions of the father and the wish to spite him.²⁴ In a sense the image of the devil is but a projection of the image of the father. A commonly observed proof that these superstitious obsessions are really connected with the infant's sexual life, and one particularly prominent in Luther's case, is the prevalence of disgusting methods of putting the fiend to flight. These are neither more nor less than the child's ways of spiting its parents, and at the same time gratifying a primitive sex impulse.²⁵ If there is anything in this hypothesis, which seems to be established by broad observation, Luther's case offers strong independent support of it. He states over and over that he found argument of no avail

¹⁹ "Von der Winkelmesse und Pfaffenweihe," 1533, *Werke*, Weimar, XXXVIII, 197f.

²⁰ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, 469. Cf. no. 802.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 508. References might be multiplied, e.g., *Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann und Bindseil, III, pp. 4-96, *passim*.

²² *Tischreden*, Förstemann-Bindseil, III, 93. Freud relates a closely parallel case from his own experience, interpreting the hallucination as the child's remembrance of hearing its father snore. *Kleine Schriften*, II, 71.

²³ E. Jones, *Der Alptraum*, p. 70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 95.

with Satan, but only some words²⁶ of untranslatable coarseness, or some act²⁷ or gesture which is simply unimaginable to persons with no first-hand knowledge of the Reformer's conversations. It is true that he inherited a certain body of these ideas along with his contemporaries Bugenhagen and Cellini;²⁸ nevertheless it is undeniable that they received from him an emphasis rarely if ever found elsewhere, and only explicable on the hypothesis of real neurosis.

Luther himself was, of course, unable to analyse his own feelings, but he showed surprising insight by the remark that it was the harsh discipline of the home that drove him into the monastery.²⁹ It was this cruel experience which gave him the dread of the powers of the other world, and which also emphasized the idea of concupiscence as the very instigation of the devil, to be fought against and crushed out at any cost.

A powerful impulse in the same direction was given by the meeting in 1497, when Martin was attending school at Magdeburg, with a Prince of Anhalt who had renounced his worldly position and become a Franciscan, in which quality "he so fasted, watched, and mortified his flesh that he looked like a death's head, mere skin and bones."³⁰ This was Brother Lewis,³¹ born a Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst in 1456, and baptized William. He had taken the vows in 1473, studied theology, and engaged in deeds of charity as well as in works of self-mortification. In 1497,³² when Luther saw him, he was at Magdeburg engaged in the pious office of mediating between the citizens of that city and their archbishop Ernest. He died in 1504 at Marburg. The extant fragments of his writings show that he emphasized the fear of God and the day of judgment,³³ though he did not forget to mention the love of Jesus. Luther speaks only of having seen the man, but it is

²⁶ "So kommt der teuffl baldt und disputirt mit mir so lang bis ich sage: leck mich in dem a—." Preger: *Luthers Tischreden nach Schlaginhausens Aufzeichnungen*, no. 31.

²⁷ If argument does not help, then, says Luther, "weyse man den Teuffel flugs mit eim furtz ab." *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, 469. Cf. p. 64. Cf. "Bugenhagen's way" of putting the devil to flight, Lösche, no. 337. Cf. *Tischreden*, Weimar, nos. 83, 812. Grisar, III, 255.

²⁸ On Bugenhagen, last note. For Benvenuto Cellini, his *Memoirs*, book I, chap. 64.

²⁹ Kroker, *op. cit.*, no. 753.

³⁰ *Werke*, Weimar, XXXVIII, 105. *Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann & Bindseil, III, 303.

³¹ L. Lemmens: *Aus ungedruckten Franziskanerbrieife des XVI Jahrh.* 1911. pp. 8-22.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15f.

probable that he knew him quite well, as he did later the priests and monks of Eisenach. His subsequent relations with the family of Anhalt were warm, and can be traced as early as 1515, when he had the friendship of Margaret of Anhalt,³⁴ wife of Prince Ernest (who died 1516). The influence of such a man as Brother Lewis in turning the susceptible boy from a wordly calling to "religion," as the monastic life was then significantly called, must have been marked. At Eisenach, where Luther attended school for three years after leaving Magdeburg, the priestly influences were very strong. He knew well the priest of St. Mary's Church, John Brown, and the Franciscans of the local chapter.³⁵

At the university of Erfurt the influences pushing him towards the monastery must have been still stronger. The town was large and flourishing;³⁶ the students led a turbulent³⁷ and fast life, so that Martin himself branded the institution as no better "dann ein hurhauss und bierhauss."³⁸ This, however, only put into stronger relief the devotion of the numerous bands of monks.³⁹

The studies at the university were naturally medieval in their presentation of life. Even those students who professed devotion to the humanities, cultivated the neo-classics of the Renaissance rather than the genuine models of antiquity. For example, when Martin heard his later opponent Jerome Emser lecture on comedy in the summer of 1504, the text was not Plautus or Terence, but Reuchlin's *Sergius*, the hero of which was a rascally monk, whom, in the opinion of Emser, Luther

³⁴ This little known fact is proved by Luther's letter to Margaret, November 4, 1519, published in *Mitteilungen des Vereins für anhaltische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 1904, x. 137f. In this he speaks of not having seen her for a long time, and that he knew her in or before 1515 may be inferred from the letter of his friend Link to Margaret of January 22, 1515. W. Reindell: *W. Linck aus Colditz*, p. 253.

³⁵ *Luthers Briefwechsel*, ed. E. L. Enders, I, 1, 3.

³⁶ A chronicler of 1572 called Erfurt the largest city in Germany. *Mitteilungen des Vereins für anhaltische Gesch.* x. 61. According to W. Köhler the town then had 32,000 inhabitants. *Im Morgenrot der Reformation*. Ed. Pflugk-Hartung, 1912, p. 347.

³⁷ Cf. Eobani Hessi *De Pugna Studentium Erphordiensium*. . . 1506, my *Luther*, p. 444. Sermon of 1539, Weimar, XLVII, 666: "At Erfurt I saw many killed."

³⁸ *Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, III, 101. On the other hand I believe there is no authority for the story attributed to Luther about the assiduous attendance of the students on the lectures of Gambrinus and Tannhäuser, given, after Hausrath, by Dr. McGiffert: "Martin Luther," *Century Magazine*, LXXXI, 177.

³⁹ On this my *Luther*, 1911, p. 8, references. p. 442.

must have taken for his pattern.⁴⁰ The Reformer tells us that the first poet he read was Baptista Mantuan, then Ovid's *Heroides* and Virgil, after which the study of scholastic theology prevented the perusal of any more verse.⁴¹ If the frank sensuality of the one Roman author, and the pathetic grandeur of the other, would take him out of the cramped world he knew, their modern imitator, whom he first read, would impress the reader deeply with his own extremely cloistral spirit. The *Eclogues*, first published at Mantua in 1498, enjoyed immense and immediate popularity, and were frequently reprinted, among other places at Erfurt in 1501,⁴² just as Luther was matriculating. The first six eclogues treat of love, with what Balzac calls "la friande concupiscence des ecclésiastiques;" that is, it is described as the most alluring but wickedest thing in the world, a passion inspired by no god but Satan.⁴³ The description of women is a choice specimen of monastic invective against the dangerous sex. Luther, whose mind was evidently much preoccupied with this side of life, read and repeated the lines over so often that forty years later he was able to quote them word for word:

Femineum servile genus, crudele, superbum. . . .
mobilis, inconstans, vaga, garrula, vana, bilinguis,
imperiosa, minax, indignabunda, cruenta,⁴⁴

and so on for many lines. The seventh eclogue is on entering the monastery, to which "Pollux" is moved by a vision; the eighth is on the "religion of the shepherds;" the ninth on the morals of the Roman Curia, and the tenth relates a controversy between observant and non-observant monks. It can be no mere coincidence that in several points these writings foreshadowed experiences soon to come into Martin's own life. The seventh eclogue particularly worked upon his impressionable, morbid fancy, preparing him for the vision he was soon to have. All the influences to which he was subjected worked on him in the same sense; they made him look with terror upon the world as the primrose path of dalliance to hell, with profound distrust upon his own powers of resisting its temptations, and upon the monastery not so much with dread as the painful means of avoiding damnation, as with a sort of love as the harbour and refuge from a sea of troubles

⁴⁰ G. Kawerau: *Hieronymus Emser*, 1898, p. 10.

⁴¹ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, no. 256.

⁴² Last reprinted by W. P. Mustard, Johns Hopkins University Press. 1911. For the editions, p. 35.

⁴³ *Eclogue* II, 112.

⁴⁴ *Eclogue* IV, 110ff. Luther's quotation, Kroker, *op. cit.*, No. 729.

where at last a man might find peace from the terrible war of the flesh against the spirit and security from the frightful dream of the wrath to come. If, many years afterwards, he said that impatience and despair made monks,⁴⁵ he was thinking of the despair that came to him immediately after his profession; in 1515 he could assert that despair made not a monk but a devil, and that no one was ever a good brother who had not taken the vows from love.⁴⁶

Yet it is possible that he would never have entered the cloister had it not been for a special experience so marked and sudden that as early as 1519 one of his friends compared it to the conversion of the Apostle Paul.⁴⁷ His mind was prepared by the terror caused by an epidemic of the plague in the spring of 1505. Such visitations, particularly in times before science had come to protect and strengthen men, frequently cause demoralization. In this case many of the students fled to their homes and some entered the monastery.⁴⁸ Martin, too, returned home, to find two of his brothers dead or dying of the terrible disease.⁴⁹ The state of his mind can easily be imagined as he turned back to the University. On the journey, on July 2, at Stotterheim, near Erfurt, he was overtaken by a thunderstorm, a meteorological phenomenon which throughout life he regarded as directly due to supernatural agency. In a particularly vivid flash of lightning, followed by a crash of thunder, his overwrought imagination saw a heavenly vision, a divine warning to leave a temporal for a spiritual vocation, and in a paroxysm of terror he cried out: "Help, St. Anna, and I will be a monk."⁵⁰ Once before, when he had wounded himself, he had called on the Virgin for aid in like manner,⁵¹ but had stopped short of taking the vow. Now that he had uttered it, he felt it to be binding, and though he regretted it, honorably discharged his promise by entering the Augustinian cloister two weeks later.

⁴⁵ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, No. 1034. *Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, I, 124.

⁴⁶ J. Ficker: *Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief*, II, 318.

⁴⁷ Crotus Rubeanus to Luther, Enders, II, 208.

⁴⁸ Eoban Hess's poem on the plague, reprinted in my *Luther*, p. 444.

⁴⁹ According to a sermon of 1544; Scheel: *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung*, 1911, p. 19.

⁵⁰ This is told most fully in a saying of July 16, 1539, in *Lutheri Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, III, 187. The same story, differing in details, is related by Justus Jonas in 1538. Scheel: *Dokumente*, p. 30.

⁵¹ *Tischreden*, Weimar, no. 119, where Luther gives the date Tuesday after Easter. The editor conjectures this was in 1503.

Leaving aside much that is otherwise interesting in the history of the next dozen years, and confining our study exclusively to the Reformer's inward development, we find the key to understanding it in the psychological truth that a man's reasonings, opinions, philosophy, are fully as much the effect as the cause of his outward experiences and actions. The reasons he gives for his belief are in fact but the explanations of the experience which led him to that belief. William James asserts⁵² that emotions follow and do not precede the bodily state; that we fear because we run away, reverence because we kneel, and love because we kiss. Argument is proverbially useless in changing a man's opinions on the deepest things in life; his attitude towards them is so rooted in his temperament and general culture that only by changing them can we alter his belief. So with Luther: the dogmas of the bondage of the will and of justification by faith only, the foundation-stones of early Protestantism, were attained not by logical deduction from Biblical or any other premises, but merely as an interpretation of his own subjective life.⁵³

The most general and long continued of these experiences was concupiscence, the importance of which in Brother Martin's development has already been recognized,⁵⁴ though the psychological reason for this, namely that events in his infancy had given this side of life an abnormal, in his own interpretation supernatural, importance has not been seen. It is true that many men, perhaps all men who have any spiritual life, have at times felt the severity of the war of the members against the spirit, the great paradox of wanting to do that which one hates. The annals of monasticism are full of such men, who rolled in snow and lashed themselves with thorns to keep the body under. But it is doubtful whether anyone ever felt the conflict more keenly than did Luther, or gave it the importance in his system that he gave it. Through it all it is to his great credit that, there is

⁵² *Psychology* (1890), II, 449ff.

⁵³ Father H. Denifle notices that Luther's opinions were won from his experiences. *Luther und Lutherthum*, I², p. 447. Prof. F. A. Christie notes the same of some of Luther's ideas. *Harvard Theological Review*, 1912, April, p. 243.

⁵⁴ E.g. by Denifle, *op. cit.*, by W. Braun: *Die Bedeutung der Koncupiszenz in Luthers Leben und Lehre*, Berlin, 1908, and now by W. Köhler: *Im Morgenrot der Reformation*, ed. Pflugk-Harttung, 1912, p. 371.

good reason to believe, he never sinned with women.⁵⁵ To those who realize what the struggle cost him, his repeated assurances that his public battles with princes and false brethren were easier than his inward struggles with the flesh and the devil, seem perfectly natural.

His writings and sayings in later life are full of strong expressions about the horrors of monastic celibacy. For one saying that as a monk he did not feel much lust,⁵⁶ there are scores which state the direct opposite. "It is easier," he once exclaimed, "to bear chains and prison than desire; he to whom the gift of chastity has not been given will not get it by fasting and vigils. It happened to me, though I was not much harassed, that the more I buffeted myself the more I burned."⁵⁷ The monks, he tells us elsewhere, were tempted by pollutions almost every night, so that they dared not celebrate mass at daybreak.⁵⁸ In one place he calls celibacy a terrible torture,⁵⁹ and in another, "a sort of secret homicide."⁶⁰ So exclusive was his preoccupation with this temptation that he says before his break with the Church he thought there was no sin but lust.⁶¹ Similar expressions might be multiplied indefinitely, from his book on *Monastic Vows*,⁶² his *Answers to Duke George*,⁶³ his *Disputations*,⁶⁴ and his letters.⁶⁵ Turning from late reminiscences to the early writings of the Reformer, his notes on Lombard's Sentences (1510-11) we get the same impression. The longest note⁶⁶ is on concupiscence, which is described as "the disobedience of the flesh and sin;" another entry⁶⁷ expresses the opinion that the lust of the flesh compels

⁵⁵ This is proved by the absence of self reproach, and of positive evidence, and by his own testimony, as *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, no. 121: "I never looked at women even when they confessed. . . . At Erfurt I heard none, at Wittenberg three only."

⁵⁶ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, no. 121.

⁵⁷ *Colloquia*, ed. Bindseil, II, 352.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* II, 355.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* II, 364.

⁶⁰ *Tischreden nach Schlaninhausens Aufzeichnungen*, no. 348.

⁶¹ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, No. 126.

⁶² Reprinted Weimar, vol. VIII. P. 583 he calls monasteries "lupinaria Satanae." P. 585 he says: "No celibate is without lust."

⁶³ Both reprinted Weimar, vol. XXXVIII.

⁶⁴ E. g. P. Drews: *Disputationen Luthers*, 1895, p. 579.

⁶⁵ E. g. his letter to Reissenbusch, March 27, 1525. Erlangen ed. LIII, 286, cf. Enders, v. 145.

⁶⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, IX, 73ff.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

the spirit to be impure. A third note⁶⁸ makes a fine distinction between the guilt of original sin, which may be abolished, and concupiscence, which is evidently conceived as original sin itself, a doctrine, indeed, to which the Wittenberger held all his life.⁶⁹ The hardest part of the battle came in the first years for which the fewest contemporary sources survive. Moreover in his public lectures and sermons he would naturally say less about this side of his private life than he felt. Nevertheless the courses he gave on the Bible for 1513-1516 occasionally refer to the matter. In a number of places he glances at it; in one note, apparently about 1514 or 1515, he says that he has learned, both from his own experience and from what others tell him, that even after a man has banished impure thoughts from his waking hours the enemy attacks him in sleep.⁷⁰ The lectures on Romans, too, emphasize the bitterness of the war between flesh and spirit.⁷¹ The effect of all this on Luther's theology will be presently shown in detail. Here in general it must be remarked that he discovered that the more he strove against lust the less he accomplished; concupiscence was, he confessed, invincible.⁷² With all his frantic efforts he could do nothing against it, nothing to merit salvation or God's favor. Therefore he was doomed necessarily to reprobation unless God of his free grace had mercy upon him. His will was impotent; his works could not justify him, but only God could help him; consequently salvation came from faith in him alone. This in broad lines is the essence of his development in the cloister, but, of course, it was not so simple. Many influences came in to modify his evolution, which must therefore be studied in greater detail.

The first three years in the monastery were a period of great depression. This was partly due to the losing battle with the flesh, for he regarded desire in itself as evil, and when he felt it at once concluded that all was up with his salvation.⁷³ Partly, too, it was purely physical depression, a pathological condition of the nerves due to their overwrought condition at the time of entry, and to the severe and gloomy discipline

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁶⁹ *Tischreden*, ed. Förstemann und Bindseil, II, 10. *Werke*, Weimar, IV, 626. *Römerbrief, Scholien*, 107, 162. Grisar, III, 3.

⁷⁰ *Werke*, Weimar, III, 423.

⁷¹ J. Ficker: *Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief*, 1908, *Glosse*, pp. 58, 68, and often elsewhere.

⁷² *Römerbrief, Scholien*, p. 110.

⁷³ His own words, Scheel: *Dokumente*, no. 52.

of the rule. Such states are not uncommon even in otherwise normal natures; some physical cause, in this case fasting and the self-inflicted pains of asceticism, produces a state of anhedonia.⁷⁴ in which melancholia often takes the form of believing oneself damned. Looking back on his experience, Martin could speak of the cloister as hell, in which the monks were lost souls.⁷⁵ In 1518 he described his own sensations as "so infernal that no tongue can tell nor pen write them, nor anyone who has not experienced them believe them; so that, had the agony endured a half or even a tenth of an hour, the man who felt them would have utterly perished and his bones have been reduced to ashes. Then God appears horribly angry, and so does all creation. There is no refuge, no consolation, either within or without, but all things speak accusation. Then the man weeps: 'I was cast out from before thy face,' nor does he even dare to say: 'Lord, correct me not in thine anger.' In this moment, wonderful to say, the soul cannot believe that it will ever be redeemed, save that it feels the punishment is not yet complete."⁷⁶ Remembering Dante and other medieval visions of future punishment we must allow that this frightful fear of hell, so little sympathetic to our sceptical age, was in part a natural consequence of the religion which concentrated men's thoughts upon the world to come. In part, however, and perhaps chiefly, the obsession of dread was a direct result of the morbid condition of the young monk's nerves. Another form of the same phobia was the conception of God as a cruel enemy, the root of which idea must be found in the thinker's neurosis, just as was his obsession by the devil. Luther himself vaguely felt the similarity of his feeling towards both God and the devil at this time when he said: "When I looked for Christ it seemed to me as if I saw the devil."⁷⁷ His dread of his Creator, in fact, could not be so much the effect as the cause of his conception of him, for the simple reason that long after his dread had departed, his conception of God, as a cruel and capricious tyrant, "who seemed to delight in the tortures of the wretched and to be more deserving of hatred than of love,"⁷⁸ remained precisely

⁷⁴ James: *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 145.

⁷⁵ *Werke*, Weimar, XXXVIII, 148.

⁷⁶ *Werke*, Weimar, I, 557.

⁷⁷ *Werke*, Weimar, XLV, 86.

⁷⁸ See more fully the quotations from *The Bondage of the Will* (1525) in my *Luther*, p. 208.

the same as before. Luther himself naturally attributed all his dread to the teaching of the Romanists: "They made of Christ nothing but a stern, angry judge, before whom we must tremble, as he would thrust us into hell. So they painted him sitting on a rainbow, with his mother Mary and John the Baptist on either side as intercessors against his frightful wrath."⁷⁹ Protestant scholars⁸⁰ have been at much pains to justify sayings like this by researches in the tracts of the opening sixteenth century, but on the whole they have failed. If there were representations of God's wrath, there was also emphasis on his love.⁸¹ The only certain fact to which Luther testifies is his own subjective feeling, and of that he has no doubt: "I did not love, I hated the just God punishing sinners, if not with silent blasphemy, at any rate with a great wail of indignation, saying that it was not enough that God should beat down poor sinners, eternally lost, with original sin and his law, but that even his gospel added woe to woe."⁸²

Angstneurose, if we may borrow from the Germans a word not exactly translatable by either "phobia" or "melancholy" or "obsession," shows itself in other ways, chiefly by a pedantic scrupulosity.⁸³ Such was exactly Luther's case. "I was a pious monk," he says, "and held to my rule so strictly that I dare assert that if ever a monk got to heaven by monkery I should have done so."⁸⁴ At the time of his novitiate the instructor of the young monks was John Jenser von Paltz, an old martinet, and a particularly firm believer in the efficacy of works.⁸⁵ He put his charges through a course of discipline which in Martin's case was the very worst thing possible. His life was now bounded by a vicious circle; the more he was depressed the harder did he ply the works of asceticism, and consequently, the worse became his mental and

⁷⁹ *Werke*, Weimar, XLVI, 8.

⁸⁰ E.g. G. Kawerau: *Luther in katholischer Beleuchtung*, 1911, pp. 52ff.

⁸¹ Grisar, I, 153ff.

⁸² Scheel: *Dokumente*, p. 17.

⁸³ S. Freud: *Kleine Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*. Erste Folge, 2d ed. 1911, p. 63.

⁸⁴ *Werke*, Weimar, XXXVIII, 143. Cf. also his remarks about hurting his health and wounding his conscience while a monk by "good works" *Ibid.*, XLIII, 615.

⁸⁵ On him, T. Kolde: *Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation und J. von Staupitz*, 1879, pp. 168, 174ff, and the article in the *Realencyclopädie*.

physical condition. He referred the new access of despair to some fault of his own, and confessed all sorts of imaginary sins. "My confessor once said to me," he relates,⁸⁶ "when I kept continually confessing foolish faults, 'You are a fool; God is not angry with you but you with him.'" Again:⁸⁷ "I often confessed to Staupitz, not about women, but about real difficulties, and he would say, 'I do not understand you.' So said they all." It is possible, indeed, that these sins were not purely imaginary, but only exaggerated. The psychologists are convinced that when a person persistently accuses himself of things he has evidently not done, it is because he has really done things he is ashamed to confess. Numerous instances have been discovered of young people who have confessed to murder, arson and all kinds of crimes of which they were innocent, because their conscience was tormented by their inability to break themselves of the habit of self-abuse, which, they had often been told, destroyed all moral stamina.⁸⁸ The habit is unfortunately so common that there would be nothing surprising in finding it in Luther; and only slightly exceptional in his case is the seriousness with which he took it. Indeed he seems to hint at this practice in the saying last quoted; he confessed, "not about women, but about *die rechten knotten*," real difficulties, or scandals, or hindrances.⁸⁹ In his lectures on Romans (1515) he speaks of the "*voluntaria et solitaria pollutio*" with sufficient detail to excite suspicion.⁹⁰

Luther's malady occasionally resulted in characteristic *crises des nerfs*. On one occasion, according to Dungersheim and Cochlaeus, the brother found him rolling on the floor like one possessed, crying: "It is not I."⁹¹ He also speaks in later life of the intense discomfort it often caused him to look upon the cross, a fact correctly interpreted by Grisar as a nervous symptom.⁹²

His earliest extant letter (April 22, 1507)⁹³ shows that he was greatly wrought up over the prospect of saying his first mass. When he actually came to celebrate that event, the thought that he was going to address God in person horrified

⁸⁶ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, no. 122.

⁸⁷ *Tischreden*, Weimar, I, p. 240. Cf. Bindseil: *Colloquia*, II, 290.

⁸⁸ S. Freud: *Kleine Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, I, 87ff.

⁸⁹ *Knote* defined *Rätselfrage, Anstoss, hindernde Grund*, in A. Götze: *Frühneuhochdeutsches Glossar*, 1912, s. v.

⁹⁰ Ficker: *Römerbrief, Scholien*, p. 26.

⁹¹ Grisar, III, 598.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 708.

⁹³ Enders, I, 1.

him and almost made him flee "like another Judas."⁹⁴ Indeed he stopped, and would not have continued but for the sharp admonitions of his prior.⁹⁵ A similar experience occurred some years later, on June 7, 1515, when he was walking in a procession carrying the host through the streets of Eisleben.⁹⁶ This last experience (if the dating is correct) is the more remarkable as Luther's other extant writings show that by this time he had won considerable self-possession, whereas all the indications point to the conclusion that the earlier years were spent in anguish. The horizon began to clear about the time of his first call to Wittenberg (October or November 1508).⁹⁷ The change was due in a measure to the affection and help given by the Vicar General, John von Staupitz, without whom the younger man, in his own opinion, would surely have gone to hell.⁹⁸ But it was not the theology of his older friend that helped him, for the similarity of their views later exhibited was due to what Staupitz learned from Luther.⁹⁹ Martin was helped most of all by the more cheerful surroundings and by the active work of study and teaching, in which his abounding energies were no longer turned inward, but found an adequate outlet. Not only were his powers thus given scope, but his attention was turned away from excessive concentration on the war with the flesh to higher cultural ends. The psychologists have a special name for this diversion of these impulses from sexual to professional or intellectual interests; they call it "sublimation."¹⁰⁰ The fact itself, that it is the worst thing in the world for a hypochondriac to spend all his time attending to his own temptations and that the best thing for him is to get into a field of absorbing work, this fact is so evident that it needs no learned terminology to recommend it. The point to notice here is that a considerable measure of relief came to Luther as a result of purely external causes; not

⁹⁴ Kroker, *op. cit.*, no. 750.

⁹⁵ Schlaginhaufen, *op. cit.*, no. 324.

⁹⁶ *Tischreden*, Weimar, no. 137.

⁹⁷ His letter to Braun, March 17, 1509, shows that he is calmer, thinking of God as "our God, who will sweetly govern us forever." Enders, I, 4ff.

⁹⁸ Enders, XIV, 189.

⁹⁹ Kolde: *Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation*, 296. Luther himself says that Staupitz helped him by turning his attention from "Satanic illusions" to the work of public teaching, Weimar, XLIII, 667.

¹⁰⁰ S. Freud: *Kleine Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 2te Folge, 1909, p. 186. This "Sublimierung" is sometimes the direct result of suppression of sex (p. 181), but abstinence does not always tend to develop liberators and men of action (p. 190).

as the consequence of a change of his ideas; least of all does it indicate that he had at this time acquired the doctrine of justification by faith only, for that was still in the future.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ As I have recently maintained that Luther's "conversion,"—i.e., the special experience which brought him the message of justification by faith,—came at this time (my *Luther*, p. 15), I must justify my change of opinion. The principal reason convincing me that Luther had *thus early* acquired his fundamental doctrine, was the story which Paul Luther remembered hearing his father tell in 1544 and which he wrote down thirty-eight years later. (Köstlin-Kawerau, I, 749; my *Luther*, p. 19). According to this while at Rome (December, 1510) Luther began climbing the Scala Santa, but suddenly remembering the text "The just shall live by faith," desisted. In any case the reminiscence of a boy of eleven, not written down by him until he was forty-nine, must be unreliable, but now that the story has been discovered in one of Luther's own sermons in a very different form, Paul's version of it must be abandoned. In 1545 (*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, XXXII, 607) the Reformer says that while at Rome he ascended the holy stairs with the purpose of getting the soul of an ancestor (his grandfather?) out of purgatory, but that when he arrived at the top he thought, "who knows whether this prayer avails?" This is certainly no proof that he then had the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Rereading of the sources has convinced me that he acquired it in 1515 or 1516. I shall devote another article to the study of Luther's development between 1508 and 1516.